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SUBJECT: GEORGIA PREPARES TO OFFICIALLY CALL FOR
REPLACEMENT OF CIS PKF IN ABKHAZIA

REF: TBILISI 964

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Georgian Foreign Minister Tkeshalashvili provided the Ambassador on June 9 with a non-paper outlining the steps the Georgian government plans to take to replace the (all-Russian) CIS peacekeepers currently stationed in Abkhazia with an international police force. The paper states that Georgia will agree to a non-use of force pledge in parallel with the withdrawal of all Russian military forces (including the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of the additional paratroopers and railroad troops) and Russia's agreement to a new peace negotiation format. The paper also calls for an increased UN role in the new peacekeeping format and reiterates Georgia's commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflicts. Tkeshalashvili told the Ambassador that the Georgians have not yet decided when to start the formal process calling for the withdrawal of the peacekeepers, noting that Georgia first wanted to work with the U.S. and Europe to find an acceptable way to substitute Russian peacekeepers with European police. She said Georgia was working closely with German Foreign Minister Steinmeier and EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and will provide them with copies of the non-paper. Georgian Ambassadors will also begin briefing European capitals on the paper's substance beginning on June ¶10. End summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: Coming on the heels of a cordial but unproductive Saakashvili-Medvedev meeting on June 6 (reftel), the Georgian non-paper represents the culmination of frustrations over recent Russian actions of the last three months while trying to maintain the diplomatic high ground by calling on Russia to be a constructive facilitator in an expanded negotiating format on Abkhazia. The Georgian leadership is concerned that further delays on replacing the peacekeeping forces with international police and internationalizing the negotiating format will result in Russia further tightening its grip on Abkhazia. A hasty Georgian call for the removal of the Russian peacekeepers would be counterproductive and it is clear that the Georgians are trying to frame this action in a way that prompts Russia to reverse some of its recent steps. Ultimately, Georgia is trying to replace the peacekeeping structure while preserving the UN presence as well as the Russian role, should Russia choose to maintain it.

¶3. (U) Begin text:

Non-paper

Georgia Calls for International Arrangement to Replace
Russian Troops in Abkhazia

Executive Summary

¶1. The recent actions of the Russian Federation in Georgia's province of Abkhazia have serially violated Georgian

sovereignty and conclusively discredited its claim to be a neutral peacekeeper. This has created an urgent need to revise the failed conflict-resolution process. (See section I of the "Supporting Materials")

¶2. Georgia has responded with restraint to these provocations and consistently sought to act in concert with the international community. It will continue to do so while pursuing a conclusive and peaceful end to the conflict.

¶3. In accordance with its unambiguous legal right and in close cooperation with the international community, the Government of Georgia will now seek the replacement of Russian troops (deployed under a CIS mandate) with a truly neutral civil force overseen by the international community.

¶4. Georgia will reaffirm its pledge on the non-use of force in parallel with Russia's withdrawal of its military forces, including peacekeepers, and its agreement to a changed peace process negotiation format.

¶5. Georgia will seek to retain and reinforce the role of the UN in the new format.

¶6. The provision of security on the ground and mediation at the negotiation table by the international community is now the sine qua non to achieve meaningful, concrete progress in ending the conflict in Abkhazia. The Government of Georgia believes strongly that Russia should be an active and constructive part of this process, if it so chooses.

¶7. The Government of Georgia reaffirms its repeatedly stated

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commitment to a comprehensive, peaceful, and negotiated solution to the separatist conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. The Government of Georgia will continue to vigorously pursue a direct dialogue with the Abkhaz, aiming to develop and mutually agree a consensus on the final settlement of the conflict within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia, by offering internationally guaranteed measures, including the widest possible autonomy for Abkhazia (See section II of the "Supporting Materials.")

Russia's Recent Escalation

The peacekeeping and negotiating formats for the Georgian province of Abkhazia have failed to yield any progress on their principal goals over the fifteen years of their existence. These are to allow the return of several hundred thousand refugees and IDPs to their homes, and to peacefully restore Georgia's territorial integrity, while respecting the legitimate concerns of the ethnically Abkhaz population of Abkhazia.

Even in the best of circumstances, the prevailing formats were ineffective. Now that they have essentially fallen apart due to Russia's actions, the international community faces a dangerous destabilization in the South Caucasus. Russia, rather than providing security on the ground, has become a party to the conflict.

This conclusion must be drawn in the light of the following events:

-- In March, the Russian Federation unilaterally - and illegally - withdrew from a long-standing CIS economic and arms embargo on the secessionist leadership of Abkhazia.

-- In April, Moscow sharply escalated tensions by decreeing the establishment of legal links between Russia and the Georgians regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This de facto recognition in effect integrates the two regions into Russia's legal space and is in direct violation of both international law and Georgian sovereignty.

-- On April 20, a Russian fighter jet shot down an unarmed Georgian aircraft over Georgian airspace, an act of aggression confirmed by UNOMIG.

-- In the weeks since, Russia has continued to unilaterally increase its troop strength in Abkhazia, without fulfilling its legal obligation of consulting with Georgia.

-- In direct contravention of all peacekeeping norms and agreements, Russia introduced offensive military troops and heavy weaponry to Abkhazia; actions that have been verified by UNOMIG.

-- Russian peacekeepers have frequently acted provocatively in the conflict zone, endangering the life and physical integrity of ethnic Georgian residents in the Gali region of Abkhazia.

The Tipping Point: Russia's Introduction of "Railroad Forces"

Russia's latest troop increase in late May, involving 400 Ministry of Defense "railroad forces," offered stark evidence of Russia's true intentions.

There is no longer any doubt that Russia is following through a well-planned scheme leading to the full annexation of the Georgian province of Abkhazia. Russia is pursuing this plan in clear disregard of Georgia's sovereign rights, international law, and in flagrant disregard of the will of the international community, including the EU and the US.

With respect to the so-called "railway forces," three issues are particularly important:

-- Their introduction into Abkhazia marks the first time that Russia has overtly overstepped its CIS mandate.

-- The April 16 decree is now being implemented militarily. Russia's attempt to justify its move on legal and humanitarian grounds was rejected by the international community. This "railroad" operation is managed by the Russian Ministry of Defense, consists of armed troops, and aims to develop Abkhazia's infrastructure to enable large-scale military movements (among other projects, the "railroad troops" are building a special rail route to the military base in Ochimchire, and are paying close attention to the roads and bridges near Kodori, a Georgian-controlled territory in upper Abkhazia).

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-- The timing and context of the "railroad" operation is crucial. It was implemented against the backdrop of the nearly universal condemnation of Russia's previous provocations by the international community; a broad international endorsement of the comprehensive peace plan developed by Georgia; and the developing prospect of a constructive dialogue leading to positive changes in the peace process.

It also took place one week prior to the visit of EU High Representative Javier Solana to Georgia, and in advance of a meeting in St. Petersburg between Presidents Saakashvili and Medvedev.

Finally, it was implemented after the assumption of the Russian Presidency by Dmitry Medvedev, implying that the new President intends to pursue the destabilizing policies of his predecessor.

Georgia's Response: Diplomacy & Clear Demands to Safeguard its Sovereignty

Immediately after the "railway" forces illegally entered its territory, Georgia engaged in close consultations with its partners.

The Government sought to generate a clear understanding both of the gravity of the situation and of the urgent need for action. Such action must include the direct involvement of the international community in revising, overseeing and guaranteeing the outcome of the conflict-resolution process.

Georgia has made it very clear that a full reversal of recent Russian actions is an essential prerequisite to make substantive progress on resolving the conflict. President Saakashvili conveyed this message to his Russian counterpart in a telephone conversation on June 3, leaving ample time for deliberations in advance of their June 6 meeting in St. Petersburg.

At that meeting, President Saakashvili clearly outlined three measures Russia needed to take to defuse the escalating crisis in Georgia's territories. These were:

- ¶1. The withdrawal of illegally deployed Russian troops;
- ¶2. an immediate stop to the ongoing construction of military infrastructure; and
- ¶3. the reversal of the April 16 decree that established official ties between Russia and the separatist republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Unfortunately, at the June 6th meeting with his Georgian counterpart, President Medvedev did not indicate any willingness to reverse these acts or to forego further provocations.

Russia is also against international mediation in the conflict. President Medvedev asserted during the June 6th meeting that Russia and Georgia could resolve the separatist conflicts bilaterally. This is not Georgia's position.

With its ongoing illegal, unilateral and often hostile acts that subvert peace in the region, Russia is clearly no longer a neutral party.

Sadly, the CIS also has proved ineffective as an actor. In a note sent in early May to the CIS Executive Committee, Georgia demanded to begin consultations on changing the mandate and composition of peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia. Georgia has yet to receive a reply to this request.

Despite these provocative moves, Georgia remains convinced that Russia's constructive participation in an internationally run process would be welcome.

First Moves: Withdrawing Russian Troops & Establishing New Security Arrangements

Urgent action is now needed to design and implement a new mechanism that can finally establish genuine, internationally guaranteed security in the region.

A negotiating format that fosters direct talks with the Abkhaz people and can lead to agreement on the implementation of a peace plan is equally essential.

With respect to security on the ground, the Government of Georgia has proposed that the Russian forces in Abkhazia be replaced by a joint Georgian-Abkhaz local police force

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trained and supervised by the European Union.

The UN's role can and should be retained; depending on the final outline of the new security arrangements, its role might even be reinforced. We believe that non-military police operations will serve as the best confidence building measure and should be part of the first steps to be undertaken for the implementation of the peace plan.

Common policing would mean that we and Abkhaz undertake

common responsibility for security while being assisted in this endeavor by the international community. However Georgia remains open to alternative international arrangements if agreed upon during consultations. If Russia confirms that it wishes to act as an unbiased and constructive actor, it would be welcome to participate in this effort.

The first step in this process must be for Georgia to formally request the termination of the peacekeeping operation under the CIS mandate and the consequent withdrawal of Russian troops from Abkhazia.

In making this demand for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgian territory, the goal of the Government of Georgia is to help lead a joint international effort to finally establish viable peacekeeping and negotiating formats, and to resolve the conflicts on its territories within a reasonable timeframe.

This will allow for long-term stability in the region, the return of refugees and IDPs, and the internationally guaranteed protection of the rights of the Abkhaz minority within a unified Georgia.

The existing legal framework of the peacekeeping operation and international law give Georgia the unambiguous legal right to make this request.

Georgia's request for the withdrawal of Russian forces will differentiate between the additional troops that were brought into the territory of Georgia in clear violation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty, and those troops connected with the peacekeeping mission.

-- The additional troops (paratroopers and railroad troops) will have to leave Georgian territory immediately, without any reservations.

-- Those troops operating within the peacekeeping framework agreed in the joint declaration made by CIS heads of state in 2003 will have to be withdrawn under Article 1 of that same declaration: "In the case one of the sides of the conflict requests to stop the CIS peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia, Georgia, the operation is considered to be ceased, and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces Command guarantees withdrawal of the contingent and armament of the peacekeeping forces during 1 month, under the timetable plan agreed with the Georgian side."

The Government of Georgia believes that the specified timeframe allows for constructive dialogue on the technicalities of withdrawal and provides the time needed to conclude negotiations on new peacekeeping formats that will provide genuine security guarantees. Finally, the timeframe allows the first practical steps of Georgia's proposed peace plan for Abkhazia to be implemented.

Meanwhile, Georgia will reaffirm its pledge on the non-use of force in parallel with Russia's withdrawal of its military forces, including peacekeepers, and its agreement to a changed peace process negotiation format.

Summary of Next Steps:

In summary, the Government of Georgia sees the following steps being taken:

-- Formal withdrawal of consent for the existing peacekeeping mandate.

-- Intense consultations with the international community to design new, internationally guaranteed policing arrangement for Abkhazia, Georgia.

-- The withdrawal of Russian troops from Abkhazia, Georgia and their replacement by a civil force under international supervision led by the EU.

-- The establishment of a new negotiating format that allows
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direct dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, with the participation of the UN, EU and OSCE. Russia's constructive role in this process will be welcomed.

-- The intense further development of the implementation details that will ensure broadest autonomy for Abkhazia and the reintegration of the Abkhazians into Georgia.

Finally, priority must be given to the difficult question of how to allow for the return of refugees and IDPs to Georgia's territory of Abkhazia, as well as for their compensation.

These rightful residents of Abkhazia were driven away by a campaign of terror labeled ethnic cleansing by the United Nations, the OSCE, and even Russia itself. Today, the population of Abkhazia is roughly one-quarter of what it was before the separatist conflict.

Over 400,000 Georgians and other non-Abkhaz were forced to flee under direct threat to their safety and lives; the vast majority remains either refugees or IDPs.

The consequent depopulation of Abkhazia distorts its politics today. Georgia recognizes that the rights and interests of the remaining inhabitants of the region (the number of which is estimated to be from 100,000 to 150,000) must be respected, but strongly disagrees that the entire fate of the region can be decided without taking into account the will of nearly three-fourth of the regions pre-conflict population.

Supporting Materials:

Section I below outlines Russia's most recent actions with respect to the Abkhazia region, many of which came in flagrant violation of international law and Georgia's sovereignty.

Section II provides an overview of Georgia's proposed peace plan for Abkhazia, while

Section III includes links to additional resources and information.

I. Russia's Destabilizing Actions

Russia's claim to be a neutral guarantor of peace in the Abkhazia region has been seriously undermined by its intentional attempts at destabilization.

-- NATO has said that Russia's behavior "does not contribute to stability, but undermines it."

-- The European Union, likewise, "is concerned that recent Russian moves in Georgia...might undermine stability on Russia's southern border."

-- In a June 5 resolution, the European Parliament expressed its "deep disapproval at Russia's announcement that it would establish official ties with institutions within the separatist authorities of South Ossetia and Abkhazia," adding that it "deplores, in this regard, the decision taken by the Russian Ministry of Defense on 31 May 2008 to send its forces to Abkhazia to restore the rail and road infrastructure in the breakaway region in accordance with the presidential decree."

The timeline below provides an overview of the Kremlin's most recent steps regarding the Abkhazia region.

II. March 6: Russia withdrew from the 1996 CIS sanctions agreement prohibiting military support to the separatist rebels, as well as limiting economic and trade relations.

¶ 12. March 21: The Russian Duma (lower house of Parliament) adopted a resolution urging the Russian government to consider "the expediency of recognizing the independence" of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. The resolution also called on the Kremlin to intensify efforts aimed at protecting its newly-minted citizens in the territories. (Russia has been distributing passports to residents in the separatist regions since approximately 2002.)

MORE INFORMATION:

[http://www.president.gov.ge/PDF/GEORGIA UPDATE 2008-05-31.pdf](http://www.president.gov.ge/PDF/GEORGIA%20UPDATE%202008-05-31.pdf)

¶ 13. April 3: In a letter to the separatist leaders in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, Russia's then-President Vladimir Putin vowed to continue his country's de-facto recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia through means that are "not declarative, but practical" - such as by lifting sanctions and establishing legal links.

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¶ 14. April 16: Russia's then-President Vladimir Putin ordered his government establish official relations with the separatist rebels in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These ties were to cover economic, social, scientific, informational, cultural, educational, and other fields.

¶ 15. April 20: A Russian Air Force fighter jet shot down an unmanned Georgian drone in Georgian airspace over the Abkhazia region. Later, a United Nations investigation confirmed that it was indeed a Russian aircraft that had downed the drone, rather than "Abkhaz air-defense forces" as Russian officials had claimed.

¶ 16. April 25: The Russian Foreign Ministry's special envoy for relations with CIS countries, Valery Kenyakin, declared that "Russia will have to react through military means" in case Georgia uses force to establish control over its separatist territories.

¶ 17. April 28: Sergey Mironov, chairman of Russia's upper house of Parliament, said that Russia would protect "its citizens" in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

¶ 18. April 29: The Russian Defense Ministry announced a unilateral decision to increase the number of its peacekeepers in the Abkhazia conflict zone. The one-sided move breached the agreements that regulate deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia.

¶ 19. May 8: The Russian Defense Ministry warned it might send even more forces into the Abkhazia region, in addition to the heavy artillery, armored vehicles, anti-aircraft systems, and over 400 paratroopers with 30 BMD-2 airborne vehicles it had recently deployed.

¶ 10. May 9: The Russian ambassador to Georgia, Vyacheslav Kovalenko, claimed that withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping forces from Abkhazia would result in war.

¶ 11. May 31: The Russian Defense Ministry announced it had sent approximately 400 of its own forces into Abkhazia - without consulting Georgia, and against Georgia's wishes - to rehabilitate the separatist region's railway and road infrastructure. World leaders condemned the move as "clearly in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity." Russia thinly veiled its actions by saying that they were "in accordance with the Russian president's decree on humanitarian aid to Abkhazia." Its defense ministry labeled the new soldiers "railroad troops," claiming they would rehabilitate strategic infrastructure in the separatist-controlled territory. However, there is no means of verifying such a claim, nor to assess how heavily armed the new troops are. Furthermore, such engineering troops are not recognized - even by Russia itself - as legitimate peacekeeping forces. Traditionally, their role is to make

technical preparations in advance of military action.

II. The Government of Georgia's Peace Plan for Abkhazia

On March 28, President Mikheil Saakashvili proposed a sweeping new peace plan for the separatist territory of Abkhazia. With international support, the plan will guarantee "unlimited autonomy, wide federalism, and very serious representation in the central governmental bodies of Georgia" for the Abkhaz. Russia will be invited, along with other members of the international community, to act as a guarantor of the process.

The new initiative builds on Georgia's 2006 peace proposal to the separatist authorities in Sukhumi and includes the following provisions:

- ¶1. Introduction of a new constitutional post of Vice-President of Georgia, to be offered to Abkhazia.
- ¶2. Guaranteed representation for Abkhazia in all governmental ministries and state agencies, and in Parliament.
- ¶3. Engagement of the international community to guarantee wide federalism and broad autonomy for Abkhazia.
- ¶4. Veto rights for Abkhazia on all decisions related to the region's constitutional status, as well as preservation and further development of Abkhazian culture, language, and ethnic identity.
- ¶5. Establishment of a joint free economic zone covering Gali and Ochimchire districts in the Abkhazia region. The plan includes joint management and control by Abkhazian and Georgian authorities; rehabilitation and productive use of currently depopulated territories; and redevelopment of the Ochimchire seaport.
- ¶6. Provision of security guarantees.

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¶7. Gradual merger of law enforcement agencies and customs services.

To elaborate the steps necessary to implement the proposals outlined above, several thematic working groups have been established within the relevant government ministries.

A legal group will prepare the required constitutional and legislative amendments, including for the creation of a Vice-Presidency and guaranteed representation in the Government and Parliament. An economic group will design the free economic zone in Gali and Ochamchire, and a political group will conduct negotiations to secure international guarantees of Abkhazia's autonomy.

In parallel, the Government of Georgia is seeking to re-establish direct political dialogue and contacts with the separatist authorities. A package of confidence-building measures will be designed and implemented in concert with the European Union; international involvement and assistance will also be sought for the thematic working groups.

The Government believes that the measures above, if implemented alongside a change in the peacekeeping format, can bring about a negotiated settlement for lasting peace in the region.

III. Additional Information

¶1. Resolution of the European Parliament on the Deterioration of the Situation in Georgia, June 5:
http://europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT_TA_P6-TA-2008-0253_0_DOC_XML_V0//EN&language=EN

¶2. Statement by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, June 3: <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-076e.htm>

¶3. Statement of the U.S. Department of State, May 31:
http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/may/105_472.htm

¶4. Remarks by EU External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, June: <http://www.unomig.org/media/headlines/?id=10744&y=2008&m=6&d=5>

¶5. Georgia Update: "Russia illegally deploys new troops in Abkhazia," May 31: http://www.president.gov.ge/PDF/GEORGIA_UPDATE_2008-05-31.pdf

End Text.

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